

West Seattle Junction

PROFILE

The West Seattle Junction is the commercial center of West Seattle. Located at the west end of the West Seattle Bridge, the West Seattle Junction Hub Urban Village contains two distinct commercial areas and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The “Junction” refers to the intersection of SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW, at the heart of a “Main Street” corridor stretching approximately three blocks along California from SW Edmunds Street to SW Genesee Street. This area has a traditional urban landscape, with low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings. Many of the village's buildings were built before World War II and are pedestrian-oriented and close to the street. The other commercial area is the “Fauntleroy Gateway.” This area, at the west end of the West Seattle Bridge, serves as the primary entry to the Junction and most of West Seattle. In contrast with the Junction, this area “presents an image of a suburban commercial arterial dominated by automobiles.” The Gateway contains a number of automobile dealerships and repair shops.

The Hub Urban Village is a jagged-edged triangle defined roughly by three points: SW Dakota Street at 45th Avenue SW, SW Andover Street at SW Avalon Way, and SW Dawson Street at 44th Avenue SW. The village encompasses 226 acres.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

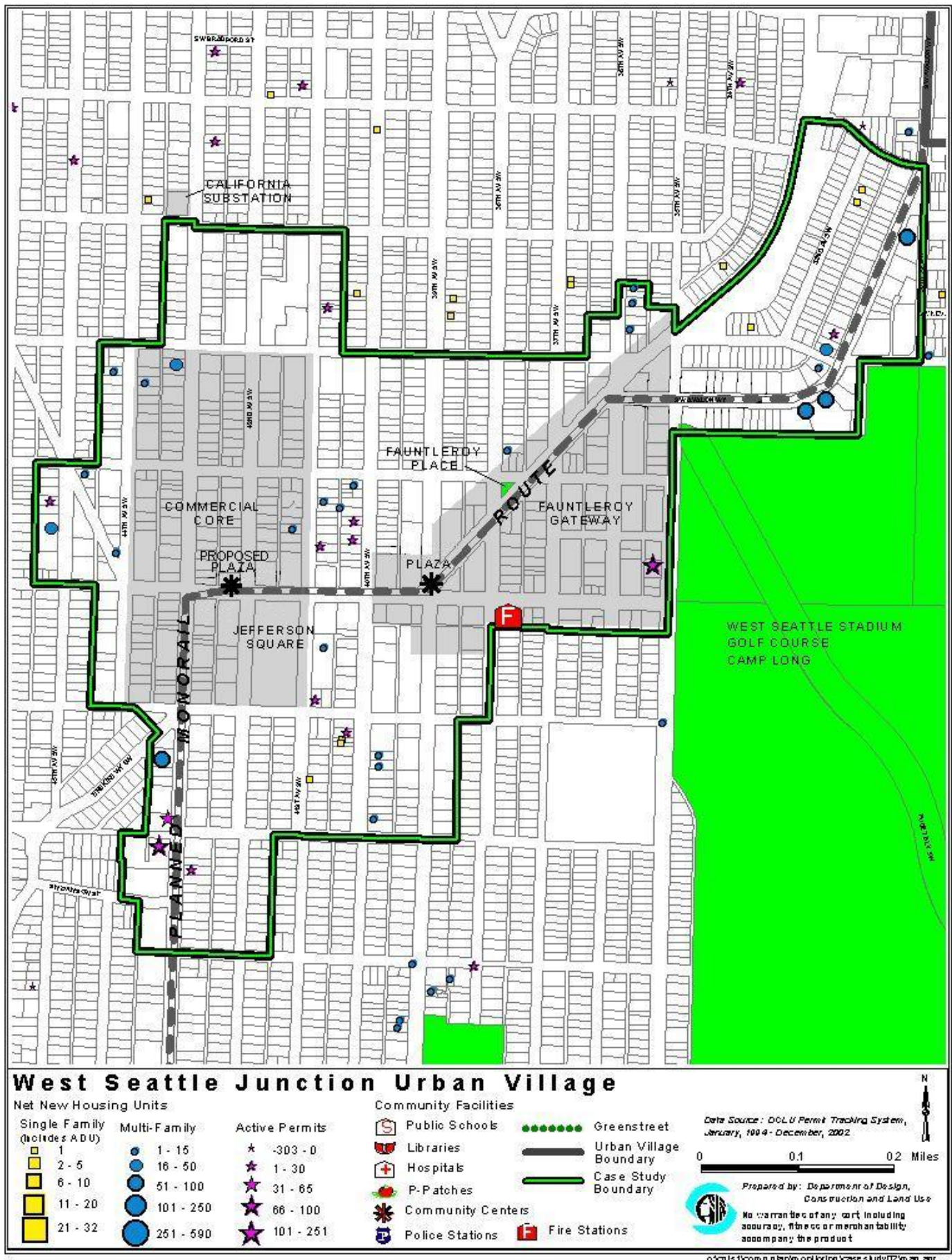
In 1998, a Seattle Post-Intelligencer feature noted that many vacant stores existed in the Junction, and that these vacancies had been a problem for many years. Strengthening the mixed-use commercial core therefore became one of the key strategies of the neighborhood plan. The other was to improve the Fauntleroy Gateway, creating an area that reflects the traditional urban character of the rest of the neighborhood. Coursing through the plan was a constant theme: to preserve the small-town character of the Junction as it grows.

The West Seattle Plan describes the Junction as having the “image of ‘Main Street’ in a small town.” It seeks to build on that retail core, maintaining and enhancing the compact mixed-use commercial core, with small town character. Among the strategies identified to maintain this character are:

- Studying and improving the traffic flow through the retail core.



One of many West Seattle Junction murals, this one depicts the historic streetcar junction.



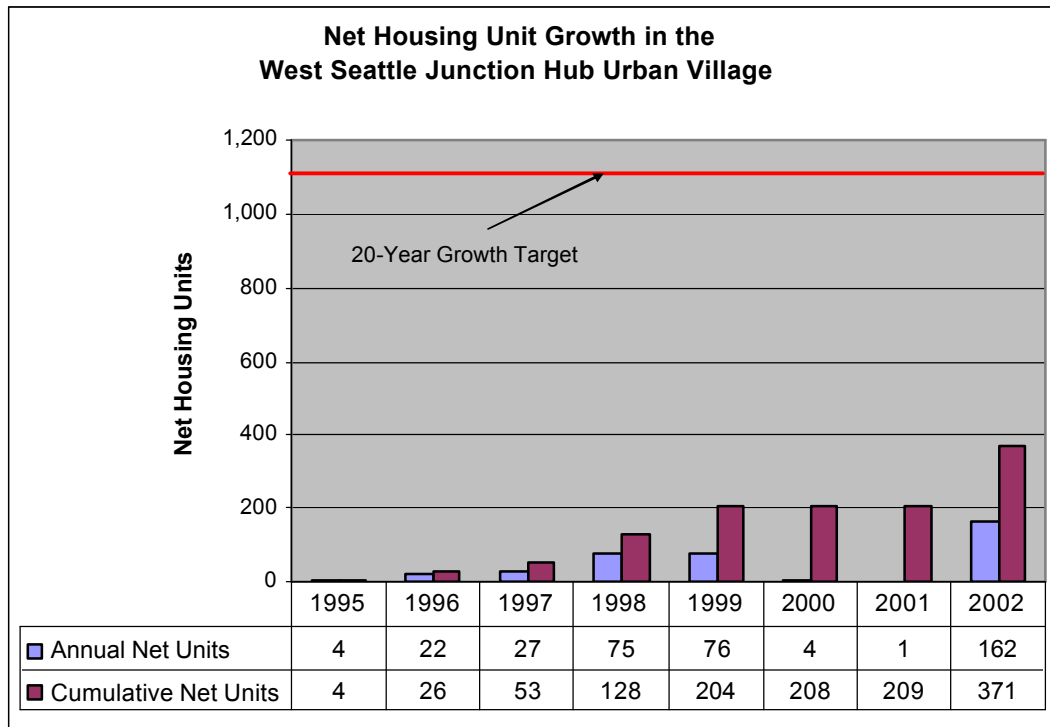
- Pedestrian improvements in and around the Junction.
- A parking study and better parking signs or a parking map.
- Street furniture, such as benches and bike racks.
- Improvements to the alleys to enable them to be used as pedestrian corridors.
- Allowing residential-only buildings in some portion of the commercial area.
- Neighborhood design guidelines.
- Public art and support for ArtsWest, a performing arts organization on California Avenue.
- New green spaces in the commercial core.
- A business recruiting and retention plan.

The Fauntleroy Gateway was characterized by the neighborhood as “inconsistent with the single-family, ‘small town’ character valued by Junction residents.” The neighborhood plan consequently sought to “create a community gateway that reflects the character of the rest of the neighborhood, presents a positive image, and improves pedestrian safety and amenities, traffic flow and general aesthetic appearance.” The activities identified to implement these goals were focused on transportation improvements:

- Developing a pedestrian corridor from 35th Avenue to California Avenue,
- Calming and managing the traffic along Fauntleroy to keep traffic at appropriate speeds and ensure access to and from Fauntleroy for neighborhood traffic.
- New bicycle lanes along Avalon and Fauntleroy.
- Improvements to the Fauntleroy Way/Alaska Street intersection, and to Fauntleroy south of Alaska Street.

GROWTH

The Junction has experienced steady, if not spectacular, growth in the past ten years. The village’s population, 3,486 in 2000, is a 21% increase from 1990, compared to an 18% increase in all urban villages and 9% citywide. From 1994 through June 2002, the village added 371 dwelling units, all but eight being multifamily units. This amounts to 34% of its growth target (1,100 households over 20 years.) Another 278 units have been issued building permits, not including a proposed 200-unit mixed-use project at the southeast corner of Alaska and California.



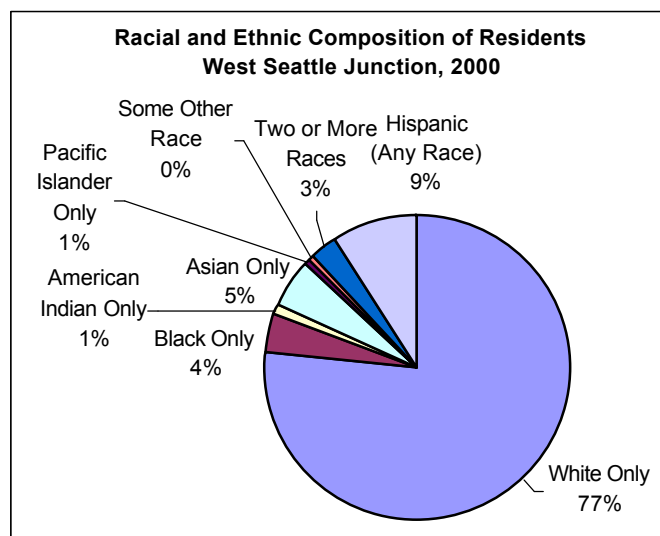
Like Greenwood-Phinney Ridge, residential growth in West Seattle Junction is due in large part to the neighborhood's relatively affordable property values, proximity to downtown, and a safe and small-town character. Commercial and mixed-use development, however, has been limited somewhat by small parcels; few big parcels exist for profitable development.

Jobs, meanwhile, increased 15% between 1995 and 2000, but then fell 5% in 2000. The largest job growth between 1995 and 2001 was an increase of nearly 200 new jobs in the employment sectors that include finance, insurance, real estate and services. Growth was strongest in the engineering, accounting and management sector which more than doubled between 1995 and 2001.

DIVERSITY

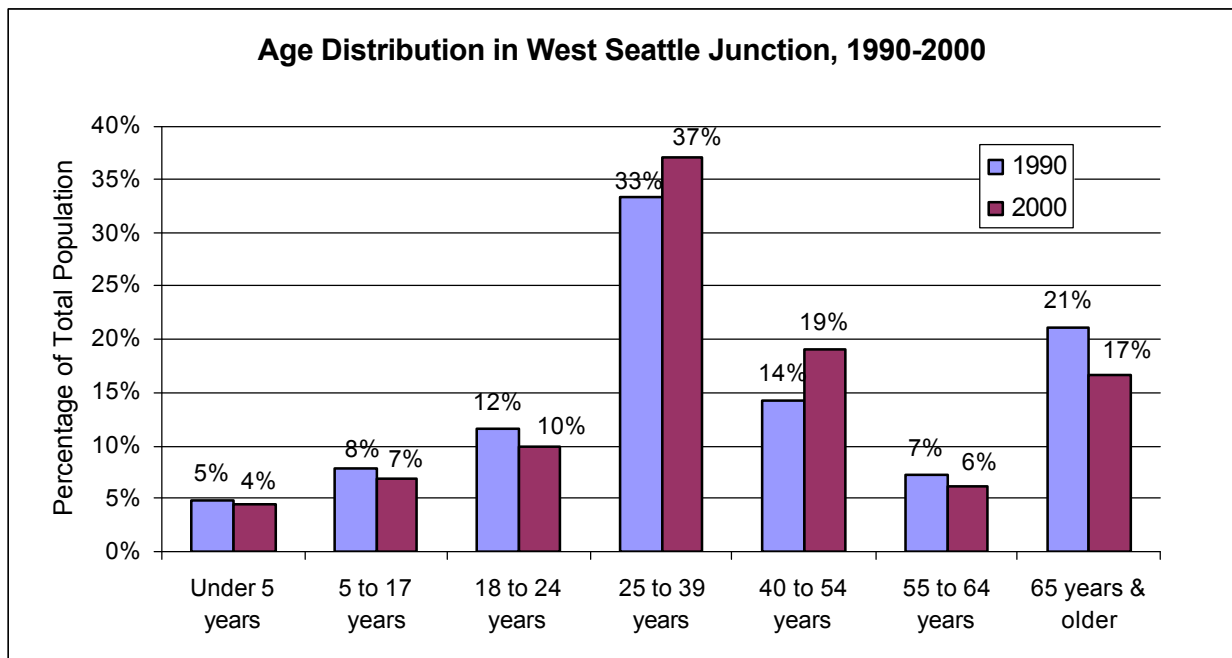
As the village's population has grown, it has started to become a popular community for Hispanic residents. The Hispanic population increased substantially in the 1990s, to 10% of the population. The West Seattle Junction has a higher percentage of Hispanic or Latino residents than the city or all urban villages as a whole.

The Junction's population is less



diverse racially than the rest of the city, with a quarter of the population of the neighborhood people of color, including Hispanics. However, this 2000 figure for the Junction is a large jump from the 1990 figure of 15%. Blacks, African Americans and Asians increased their numbers somewhat.

Household demographics have become less family-based, and more like many other urban villages. In fact, despite the Junction's self-image as a family-oriented neighborhood, within the urban village, only about one-third of households in the village are families, and only about 1 in 7 has children – while over half are one-person households. This latter group is also the fastest growing. Eight percent (8%) of the village's household growth came from family households, but 63% came from one-person households. The Junction's share of households that include seniors, despite a 12% drop is, at 22%, still high for urban villages or Seattle as a whole.



With respect to its age profile, the Junction increased in the middle, as did the rest of Seattle, but fell or stayed the same in all other age groups. Combined, 25 to 54-year-olds jumped from 47% to 56% of the population in this village.

Changes in household types have largely followed citywide trends. Most new dwelling units are in multi-family buildings and have fewer rooms than single-family homes. They have been more popular with singles than with families.

VIBRANT, PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED COMMERCIAL AREAS

The two commercial areas have been treated differently in the past and are currently developing into very different areas. Planned to be a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, commercial area, zoning along California has requirements that bring buildings close to the sidewalk, with ground-floor commercial space. Significant street improvements were recently made on California that focused on the pedestrian environment as well as the way the street works for cars.

The Gateway, on the other hand, is zoned as an auto-oriented area. Although there are some pedestrian amenities in this area, including a series of pocket parks along Fauntleroy Avenue that, in a pedestrian-oriented area, would be significant pedestrian



The Junction's small town character has been enhanced through pedestrian improvements, including wider sidewalks, street trees and pedestrian lighting

amenities, it is continuing in its current form as an automobile-oriented area. The Commercial zoning in the Gateway allows commercial buildings to be set back from the street, with parking lots between the street and the building. Drive-through windows are allowed by zoning, and have proliferated throughout this area.

Commercial vitality on California Avenue SW has increased markedly in a very short time. In 1998, a retired West Seattle journalist was quoted in the Seattle P-I as saying: "Empty storefronts in the Junction has been a sad situation over the past several years." As of the summer of 2002, the Junction's storefronts were completely occupied. Pedestrian activity along the "Main Street" has increased and parking is more difficult to find. Shoppers enjoy a full range of goods and services.

In addition to an active and strong West Seattle Junction Association (WSJA), a business improvement association, credit for the revitalization of the commercial district goes to the \$250,000 streetscape

project on California Avenue, which included traffic signal improvements, curb bulbs, new sidewalks with street trees and decorative light fixtures and tiles produced by Junction residents. This project is the result of the neighborhood moving to have sidewalk changes made at the same time that the street improvements were being made. The sidewalk component of this project was originally planned to include only minor reconstruction and repairs. However, with \$80,000 in donations by the local businesses and property owners, enough money was raised which, when joined with a Neighborhood Matching grant, and City funds from a number of other sources, provided for the complete reconstruction of the sidewalks.

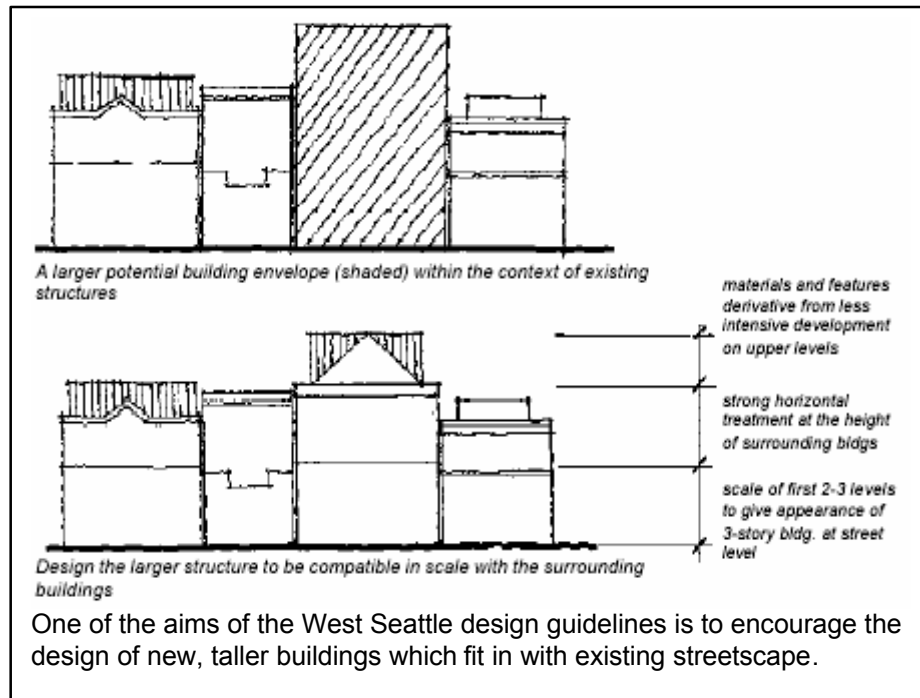
The WSJA has installed and maintains hanging flower baskets and holiday decorations. Another attraction is the ArtsWest arts center, with a theater that has generated considerable foot traffic in the evenings, benefiting dining and other establishments.

Most businesses in the neighborhood have moved into existing buildings, but new construction is also occurring. New neighborhood design guidelines, adopted in 2001, encourage new development to fit in with the existing character of the neighborhood and have been useful to the community and developers.

Community members hope that these guidelines will ensure that residential and commercial areas remain compatible, and new development does not draw the type of criticism as some projects built in the last ten years (such as Jefferson Square, at the corner of 42nd Avenue and SW Alaska Street).

The key strategies of the neighborhood plan directed improvements to both the California Avenue Junction and the Fauntleroy Gateway. Although improvements to 35th Avenue Southwest are planned for 2003 and a curb bulb at 39th Avenue Southwest and Fauntleroy has been landscaped, the Gateway, while sharing some of the prosperity of the late 1990s, has not yet seen the neighborhood plan's desired transportation improvements. The WSJA's jurisdiction does not include the gateway, and the gateway has not had the same level of attention as the commercial core from either the community or the City.

However, the existing businesses in the Gateway appear to be healthy. This means that the area is unlikely to redevelop into a more pedestrian-oriented area in the near future.



One of the pocket parks along Fauntleroy Avenue with auto-oriented businesses behind.

A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES BUILT TO APPROPRIATE SCALE.

As suggested above, virtually all residential growth in the Junction has been in multi-family units, resulting in rental units growing faster than ownership units. To date there has been little appreciable change in building scale in much of the neighborhood.

However, many single-family homeowners are concerned about a change of scale and character. In some locations, single-family zoning abuts commercial zoning with a 65-foot height limit, leading to concern about appropriate transitions and the relationship between commercial development and the existing residential neighborhood.

One portion of the neighborhood that has seen significant residential growth is along Avalon Way, at the east end of the neighborhood. Between 1995 and 2002, this mid-rise area has seen three new multifamily buildings each with more than 50 units, and a number of smaller buildings. This area is separated from the core of the Junction by the automobile-oriented Gateway area.

The home ownership rate within the urban village held steady between 1990 and 2000 at 25% of all units. The popularity of housing in the Junction is due in part to its greater affordability than many other parts of Seattle. This in turn is said to stem from a perceived separation or distance from downtown. The Census indicates that the median value of houses grew to \$230,000 in the village, less than the city's overall \$252,000 but increasing at the same rate as values citywide.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE OF THE CORE

Other than a Neighborhood Service Center located at the Junction, community facilities are not within easy walking distance of the core of West Seattle Junction. At least three private schools are located within the village, but the closest public schools are over one-half mile from the core. An elementary school, Jefferson Elementary, was once located in the heart of the Junction where Jefferson Square now sits. Presently, residents must travel to Delridge for access to a community center, and to Admiral for a branch library. Only the eastern portion of



California Avenue substation.
Source: Dept. of Parks & Recreation

the village has usable open space within one-eighth mile as they have access to West Seattle Stadium, the West Seattle Golf Course and Camp Long. These three facilities are adjacent to the eastern boundary of the neighborhood.

The streetcar junction from which the neighborhood takes its name was built in 1907 and the neighborhood was fully established by 1911. The 1999 neighborhood plan may have been the first time a concerted effort was raised by the community to create more usable open space.

In response to the neighborhood plan, at least three projects have begun to bring new facilities close to the core:

- Seattle Parks and Recreation has acquired the old California Avenue Substation located at 4304 SW Dakota Street from Seattle City Light with the intent to renovate the historic building for community use and to develop the property for park use.
- The City Council approved Pro-Parks funds to acquire a large lot at 48th Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street west of the village for a park.
- Finally, plans spearheaded by the WSJA, are underway for a public plaza at the northeast corner of SW Alaska Street and 42nd Avenue. The plaza would support informal gatherings, small concerts, and similar urban activities.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

West Seattle Junction's community identity is woven tightly into the perceptions of greater West Seattle. All West Seattleites seemingly know of the peninsula's former incorporation independent of Seattle, and prize an independence of spirit that is bolstered by the geographical separation from the rest of the city. Neighborhood planning has inspired action to rediscover the unique history of the Junction and to establish tangible ways for the community to gather, such as the new jazz festival. At the same time, because all three "Junctions" (Morgan, Alaska, and Admiral) undertook neighborhood planning at the same time, there is more connection between community groups than there was before neighborhood planning.

As part of the pedestrian improvements at the heart of the junction, community members designed tiles to decorate the new streetscape. These tiles work with the many murals that are sprinkled throughout the neighborhood to provide a unique sense of place and identify the Junction as a neighborhood where community members have visibly invested in the community.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, AND INTERACTION

Neighborhood plan stewardship is shared between the WSJA and the Friends of the Junction (FOJ). The WSJA concentrates on the business core and its issues, while the FOJ focuses on residential areas. Leaders of both organizations praise each other for significant achievements in the community. For example, the WSJA receives a great deal of credit for garnering funding to make the streetscape project successful. In addition to the City's funding, local businesses contributed some \$80,000 in voluntary contributions.

The Association also helps sponsor the summertime farmer's market and a new September jazz festival.

Moreover, the sense of partnership has taken on broader meaning. In the words of one interviewee, "the people of West Seattle Junction have rediscovered the value of neighborhood business areas." Not only does this mean that they shop near home, but they are more supportive of activities that promote business growth. They have learned that the long term prosperity, aesthetic quality, and security of their neighborhood depend on healthy neighborhood businesses and, especially, pedestrian traffic. Neighborhood planning and other planning activities helped bring about this change.

MOBILITY

The Junction is well served by Metro bus lines. Generally, service to and from downtown Seattle runs every 15 minutes. The 2000 development of a transit-only lane on the West Seattle Bridge has improved transit access to the Junction. These improvements have decreased the commute time into Downtown Seattle. Service between Admiral to the north and White Center to the south operates every 30 minutes in off-peak hours. Pedestrian facilities are adequate throughout the village, and while the neighborhood does not have marked bicycle paths, its residential streets provide generally safe bike routes.

With citywide voter approval for a monorail transit system, a line is now being planned that would have two stops in the Junction, on its way from SW Morgan Street to Downtown. People interviewed in the Junction expressed concern about the potential impact of the monorail on the function and character of the community. Business people and residents worry that in addition to lowering aesthetic and property values, the new system would create major automobile traffic problems, especially if the monorail authority does not provide adequate parking.

SUMMARY

With recent improvements to the California Avenue pedestrian streetscape, a fully-occupied retail core and three new open spaces within walking distance of the village, the West Seattle Junction urban village appears to be maintaining its "small town character" as development and population and employment growth occurs. However, the village maintains two distinct identities. The "Fauntleroy Gateway" at the west end of the West Seattle Bridge continues to be a healthy auto-oriented commercial district with little attraction to pedestrians. The "Junction," centered at Alaska and California, on the other hand is a thriving pedestrian-oriented "town center."